

BLACK FLAG

Building an anti-oppression politics that works

—Black Flag Editors

In thinking through the questions tackled in “We shouldn’t work with white people...” in this issue, we encountered an even bigger question: How do we create genuinely anti-oppressive movements and spaces that actually confront and help dismantle systemic oppressions—white supremacy, racism, patriarchy, and so on—while at the same time avoiding the “liberalism” often associated with anti-oppression politics.

What do we mean by “liberalism,” and how can anti-oppression

politics be “liberal”? Here, “liberalism” means the belief that the current system of capitalist economics and “representative democracy” politics is basically good, and that we simply need to make tweaks and adjustments to this system (mainly new legal reforms and social programs) to make it work fairly and justly for everyone. We contrast “liberal” with “radical,” a political orientation that views the status quo as unalterably corrupt, and attempts to change how our society functions fundamentally “at its roots” (“radical” comes from a Latin word

meaning “root”)—usually through various forms of revolutionary transformation, whether gradual or in specific momentary upheavals. Obviously, anarchist politics belong to the “radical” category.

To understand how anti-oppression politics can sometimes be liberal (or, at least, counter-radical), we should first understand what we mean by “anti-oppression politics.” The piece “Anti-Oppression Politics in Anti-Capitalist Movements” from vol. 1 (2005) of the radical Canadian journal

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Letter from the Black Flag editors: “You can’t be effective on a burning train” OR “why anarchism isn’t enough”

...One evening a cousin of Sasha, a young boy, took me aside. With a grave face, as if he were about to announce the death of a dear comrade, he whispered to me that it did not behoove an agitator to dance. Certainly not with such reckless abandon, anyway. It was undignified for one who was on the way to become a force in the anarchist movement. My frivolity would only hurt the Cause.

I grew furious at the impudent

interference of the boy. I told him to mind his own business, I was tired of having the Cause constantly thrown into my face. I did not believe that a Cause which stood for, a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from conventions and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy. I insisted that our Cause could not expect me to become a nun and that the movement should not be turned into a cloister. If it meant that, I did not want it. “I want

freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody’s right to beautiful, radiant things.” Anarchism meant that to me, and I would live it in spite of the whole world — prisons, persecution, everything. Yes, even in spite of the condemnation of my own closest comrades I would live my beautiful ideal. —Emma Goldman, Living My Life, Chapter 5.

In this issue, several important pieces assess some of the problems currently facing our movement,

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Upping the Anti offers the following:

“The modes of resistance and struggle that came out of liberation movements in the latter part of the 20th century gave rise to anti-oppression organizing and politics. Anti-oppression arose out of the left’s failure to develop a nuanced approach to questions of oppression and to consider various forms of oppression as ‘class issues’... To the annoyance of some leftists who argue that capitalism and class form the fundamental basis of all oppression, anti-oppression organizing seeks to understand the connections between racism, sexism, heterosexism, colonialism and class. Anti-oppression politics have the potential to provide a useful antidote to reductionist perspectives which leave out the fundamental roles of patriarchy and racism in determining both capitalism and class relations” (<http://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/01-anti-oppression-politics-in-anti-capitalist-movements/>).

We’re all probably familiar with this type of organizing, which often (although not always) has the following features:

--Advocates a theoretical lens of intersectionality, which, to quote Patricia Hill Collins, avoids “examining gender, race, class, and nation, as separate systems of oppression,” and instead analyzes “how these systems mutually construct one another” (http://is.muni.cz/el/1423/podzim2012/SAN237/um/HillCollins_Hypatia-Intersections.pdf).

--Emphasizes “calling out” inappropriate or bigoted behavior and exhorts members of privileged groups (e.g. white people, men) to “check their privilege.”

--Pays close attention to the use of language, and how subtle linguistic choices can reinforce or reproduce oppression.

--Strives to create “safe spaces” that avoid, transcend, and resist systemic oppressions.

--Has prescriptions for how privileged (e.g. white or male) allies, accomplices, or co-conspirators (the choice of term is associated with different theoretical positions) should behave in order to avoid reproducing oppression/privilege.

--Centers the lived experience of members of oppressed minority groups as a guide to analysis and action.

Obviously, these brief bullet points are a rough sketch—no summary can fully capture the wide and rich array of an entire field of thought.

However, with this rough sketch in mind, let’s return to the question: How can anti-oppression politics sometimes function in a “liberal” or counter-radical fashion (despite being well-meaning and radical in orientation)?

One clue is in the fact that liberal organizations have adopted them. As Junie Désil, a self-described “Haitian-Canadian feminist community organizer” states in the *Upping the Anti* piece mentioned earlier:

“Anti-oppression politics, however empowering and liberatory, does have its drawbacks. It’s now the new buzzword in the social activist/education scene, and is quickly being co-opted and absorbed into mainstream spaces. In my paid work, I receive phone calls from organizations, unions, school boards, and university student groups asking for anti-oppression workshops. Others call wanting to find out what an anti-oppression framework would look like and how it can be implemented, as if doing so will only take a phone call, or the workshop time requested.”

However, while this co-optation of anti-oppression politics by liberal institutions is concerning to radical activists, it could simply be a sign of (limited) progress (i.e. mainstream institutions changing) and does not necessarily reflect badly on the politics themselves.

Let’s examine, then, some concerns raised by radical activists regarding how the practice of anti-oppression politics as sketched above sometimes leads to problematic outcomes:

1. Anti-oppression politics (especially intersectionality) can mistakenly homogenize minority groups and blur distinctions between different groups, struggles, and experiences.

For example, centering the experiences of marginalized individuals as a unit of analysis—an admirable goal for undermining dominant narratives—can sometimes risk reifying these individuals as “experts on oppression” (a term CrimethInc has used: <http://www.crimethinc.com/texts/atoz/underminingoppression.php>) whose personal views are assumed to represent whole groups of people,



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and are therefore unchallengeable. In “Who Is Oakland: Anti-Oppression Activism, the Politics of Safety, and State Co-optation” (2012), a self-described “group of people of color, women, and queers” argues the following:

“No demographic category of people could possibly share an identical set of political beliefs, cultural identities, or personal values. Accounts of racial, gender, and sexual oppression as ‘intersectional’ continue to treat identity categories as coherent communities with shared values and ways of knowing the world. No individual or organization can speak for people of color, women, the world’s colonized populations, workers, or any demographic category as a whole – although activists of color, female and queer activists, and labor activists from the Global North routinely and arrogantly claim this right. These ‘representatives’ and institutions speak on behalf of social categories which are not, in fact, communities of shared

opinion. This representational politics tends to eradicate any space for political disagreement between individuals subsumed under the same identity categories...

Demographic categories are not coherent, homogeneous ‘communities’ or ‘cultures’ which can be represented by individuals... Representing significant political differences as differences in privilege or culture places politics beyond critique, debate, and discussion.” (<https://escalatingidentity.wordpress.com/2012/04/30/who-is-oakland-anti-oppression-politics-decolonization-and-the-state/>).

The quoted passage highlights the uncomfortable truth that anti-oppression politics, when misapplied or carelessly pursued, can stifle honest discussion/debate within activist communities by insisting that differences in viewpoint are in fact differences in identity. Disagreement between people perceived to be “on the same side” becomes unfathomable. This attitude can lead to dogmatism, and the belief that “anyone who disagrees with me is a bigot and/or a bad person.”



Similarly, as the passage argues, anti-oppression politics can sometimes reproduce the stereotype that a minority individual “represents” an entire minority group. This stereotype is not far-removed from the racist belief that white males, as members of the dominant, “normative” group, are individuals, unique from every other; minorities, on the other hand, form an undifferentiated mass—“blacks,” “queers,” “immigrants”—that can be lumped together. Any individual identity they may have is presumed to be secondary to their group identity. Obviously, avoiding such essentialist thinking must be a goal of radical groups striving to eradicate oppression.

2. In rightly trying to overcome the failure of past left movements to deal adequately with various oppressions, anti-oppression politics can sometimes wrongly ignore the

importance of class as a near-universal oppressive factor.

We alluded to this point in “We shouldn’t work with white people...” included in this issue. In “Anarchism and the Black Revolution” (1993), former-Black-Panther-turned-Black-anarchist Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin reminds us of the importance of class analysis in understanding racial politics:

“The continual subjugation of the masses depends on competition and internal disunity. As long as discrimination exists, and racial or ethnic minorities are oppressed, the entire working class is oppressed and weakened. This is so because the Capitalist class is able to use racism to drive down the wages of individual segments of the working class by inciting racial antagonism and forcing a fight for jobs and services. This division is a development that ultimately undercuts the living standards of all workers. Moreover, by pitting whites against Blacks and other oppressed nationalities,

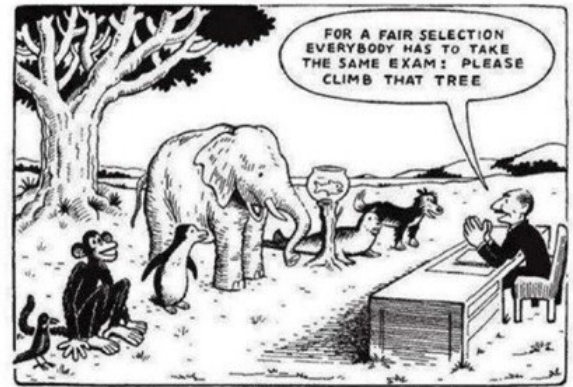
Implementing Skillshares in an Urban Classroom

by MD 5

As a first-year public school educator, I spent this past year trying to find ways of actualizing the spirit of anarchism in the classroom. One way in which I did so was by implementing student-led skillshares in class. For the sake of my action research, I define a skillshare as a gathering of people who present and participate in learning how to use or perform a skill with the purpose of disseminating capital and/or knowledge. My interest in doing this came about by becoming aware that there is still much work to be done in terms of not only the theory, but the practice, of anarchist and radical pedagogies in the classroom. I read different books and articles and noticed that, perhaps unsurprisingly, nowhere in academia was there mention of skillshares as a practical application of anarchism, let alone bringing this informal educational practice into the classroom.

To implement skillshares in the classroom, I first asked students what skills they had which they think their peers would find interesting or relevant. About half of the class had skills that could be implemented, but others had difficulty thinking of one to implement in class and I had to work with them to brainstorm ideas. I put the skills on a ballot and they each voted for their top three, and from there the classroom's top three were chosen to implement. The four skillshares we ultimately did in class were on how to defend yourself, how to perform a magic trick, how to braid hair, and how to do some dance moves.

It was a tough process at times because the students have been disenfranchised and taught to think a certain way about what their role in the world is. Some of those who presented thought it was difficult to teach others and others simply were not able to think of a skill. The students come from working-class backgrounds, and they have had a very different educational experience compared to their affluent counterparts. Whereas students in affluent schools are taught to think critically, encouraged to take control of their lives and education, and to take on leadership roles, students from urban schools are taught to obey, to perform rote tasks, and to memorize and then regurgitate unquestioned knowledge. Some would say the school system is broken. But one of my comrades helped me see that it works like a newly oiled machine because it meets its goal of churning out a few leaders for the capitalist class and deeming the rest "failures" (and thus their natural position is as part of the



Our Education System

lower class). Schools produce and reproduce systems of inequality reflected in society and similarly society produces and reproduces systems of inequality reflected in schools. Thus while it was one of my goals of implementing skillshares to have the students think outside of the "you don't have any knowledge, skills, talent, worthiness" mindset with which they have been indoctrinated, it was by no means an easy task. I know I will need to continue to find ways to have urban students see themselves as agents in this world.

After having participated in the four skillshares mentioned above, I had them take a survey and talk about what they learned as a result of this experience. But I think that despite these difficulties, students ultimately learned some powerful lessons about their education, their peers, and their skills. These are a few of their direct responses when asked what they learned from participating in the skillshares we implemented:

- "The most important lesson I learned is that other people know stuff you don't."
- "You can do anything as long as you give it a try."
- "That don't judge a person with the way they look because they can show some awesome skills."
- "Everyone has something they could share."
- "I learned from the people performing the skills were nervous at first but then they acted normally because they were doing something that they were confident about. I learned if you are confident about something then your fear might go away."
- "That there are a lot of skills to be taught and learned besides school."
- "The most important lesson that I learned was that something you might think is not a good skillshare can be very helpful to some people."

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It is my hope that utilizing skillshares in the classroom will show a practical application of anarchist pedagogy, as it currently seems to have focused most of its energy on theoretical work. Theory should be rooted in and investigated through practice because students and educators need to be provided with tangible opportunities towards liberation. While implementing skillshares in an urban classroom may add to the literature on anarchist pedagogies which already exists, it will also provide any and all secondary school educators with an opportunity to harness and circulate the cultural wealth which students bring into class and that too often goes unnoticed.



Saul Alinsky's 12 Rules for Radicals

In some ways the Machiavelli of radical community organizers, Saul David Alinsky (1909-1972) put down the following “Rules for Radicals” in his 1971 book of that name. While these “rules” might not be embraced by all of today’s anarchists, they certainly provide some stimulating suggestions to consider. –Black Flag Editors

(From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rules_for_Radicals)

1. “Power is not only what you have, but what the enemy thinks you have.” Power is derived from 2 main sources – money and people. “Have-Nots” must build power from flesh and blood.
2. “Never go outside the expertise of your people.” It results in confusion, fear and retreat. Feeling secure adds to the backbone of anyone.
3. “Whenever possible, go outside the expertise of the enemy.” Look for ways to increase insecurity, anxiety and uncertainty.
4. “Make the enemy live up to its own book of rules.” If the rule is that every letter gets a reply, send 30,000 letters. You can kill them with this because no one can possibly obey all of their own rules.
5. “Ridicule is man’s most potent weapon.” There is no defense. It’s irrational. It’s infuriating. It also works as a key pressure point to force the enemy into concessions.
6. “A good tactic is one your people enjoy.” They’ll keep doing it without urging and come back to do more. They’re doing their thing, and will even suggest better ones.
7. “A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag.” Don’t become old news.
8. “Keep the pressure on. Never let up.” Keep trying new things to keep the opposition off balance. As the opposition masters one approach, hit them from the flank with something new.
9. “The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself.” Imagination and ego can dream up many more consequences than any activist.
10. “If you push a negative hard enough, it will push through and become a positive.” Violence from the other side can win the public to your side because the public sympathizes with the underdog.
11. “The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative.” Never let the enemy score points because you’re caught without a solution to the problem.
12. “Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.” Cut off the support network and isolate the target from sympathy. Go after people and not institutions; people hurt faster than institutions.



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the Capitalist class is able to prevent workers from uniting against their common class enemy. As long as workers are fighting each other, Capitalist class rule is secure”

(<http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/lorenzo-kom-boa-ervin-anarchism-and-the-black-revolution>).

Ervin’s analysis suggests that over-emphasis on racial difference actually serves the capitalist class, by undermining solidarity between white and minority workers.

Common Cause Ottawa goes further in the zine “With Allies Like These: Reflections on Privilege Reductionism” (2014):

“Intersectionality is often evoked in a manner that isolates and reifies social categories without adequately drawing attention to common ground. Crucial to its analysis is an emphasis on a politics of difference—it is asserted that our identities and social locations necessarily differentiate us from those who do not share those identities and social locations. So, for example, a working class queer woman will not have the same experiences and by extension, the same interests as an affluent woman who is straight. Similarly, a cis-man of colour will not have the same experiences and by extension the same interests as a trans* man of colour, and so on and so forth. Within this framework, difference is the fundamental unit of analysis and that which precedes and defines identity. This practice works to isolate and sever connections between people in that it places all of its emphasis on differentiation.

There are seemingly endless combinations of identities that can be

articulated. However, these articulations of difference do not necessarily get at the root of the problem. As [Patricia] Collins argues: ‘Quite simply, difference is less a problem for me than racism, class exploitation and gender oppression. Conceptualizing these systems of oppression as difference obfuscates the power relations and material inequalities that constitute oppression.’

It is absolutely true that our social locations shape our experiences, and may influence our politics. Acknowledging difference is important, but it is not enough. It can obscure the functioning of oppression, and act as a barrier to collective struggle. The experiences of a female migrant who works as a live-in caregiver will not be the same as a male worker who has citizenship and works in a unionized office. These differences are substantial and should not be ignored. However, in focusing only on difference we lose sight of the fact that both are exploited under capitalism, and have a shared interest in organizing to challenge Capital. To be clear, this is not to say that divisions can be put aside and dealt with ‘after the revolution,’ but to highlight the importance of finding common ground as a basis to bridge difference and organize collectively to challenge oppression. In the words of Sherene Razack: ‘speaking about difference...is not going to start the revolution.’ Moving beyond a politics of difference, we need an oppositional politics that seeks to transform structural relations of power” (<http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/common-cause-ottawa-with-allies-like-these-reflections-on-privilege-reductionism>).



The conclusions drawn here lead naturally to the next point.

3. By over-emphasizing individual privilege, and how to “check” it, anti-oppression politics can risk personalizing systemic oppressions and undermining attempts to collectively organize to overthrow systemically-oppressive systems.

The constant agonizing in some “anti-oppressive” spaces over how individuals can “check” their privilege seems to involve the implicit assumption that privilege is a matter of choice, and can be relinquished by appropriate personal action. This assumption forces us to ask: even if a privileged, university-educated, cis-gender white male person, for example, can be educated or “checked” into behaving “properly” within a particular activist space, what has this dubious accomplishment done to undermine patriarchy, racism, or other oppressive systems *as systems*? Don’t these oppressive systems continue to operate out in the world, ready to “take over” as soon as we leave a designated “safe space”? Aren’t they, in some ways, baked into all of our psyches by our having grown up in a culture of patriarchy, racism, homophobia, and so forth?

The authors of the “Who is Oakland” piece frame the problem this way:

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“According to the dominant discourse of ‘white privilege’... white supremacy is primarily a psychological attitude which individuals can simply choose to renounce instead of an entrenched material infrastructure which reproduces race at key sites across society—from racially segmented labor markets to the militarization of the border. Whiteness simply becomes one more ‘culture,’ and white supremacy a psychological attitude, instead of a structural position of dominance reinforced through institutions, civilian and police violence, access to resources, and the economy. At the same time a critique of ‘white privilege’ has become a kind of blanket, reflexive condemnation of any variety of confrontational, disruptive protest while bringing the focus back to reforming the behavior and beliefs of individuals. We contend that privilege politics is ultimately rooted in an idealist theory of power which maintains that the psychological attitudes of individuals are the root cause of oppression and exploitation, and that vague programs of consciousness-raising will somehow transform oppressive structures.”

Their point about condemning “confrontational” direct action as being only available to the privileged (particularly able-bodied “macho” white males) who possess the legal, economic, and social privileges to mitigate the personal impact of these actions—an argument many in the anarchist movement have no doubt heard—is particularly distressing. It suggests that marginalized communities should only engage in non-confrontational, unprovocative actions that are “inclusive” of, for example, the community’s disabled and undocumented members—in essence, what Common Cause Ottawa calls an “implicit pacifism.”

In anarchist thought, which respects the right of individuals and groups to choose for themselves how to engage in struggle (diversity of tactics), this pacifism implicit in privilege politics seems hopelessly conservative.

As Delio Vasquez writes in “The Poor Person’s Defense of Riots: Practical Looting, Rational Riots, and the Shortcomings of Black Liberalism” (2014; originally in CounterPunch and reprinted in the zine “Revolutionary Solidarity—A Critical Reader for Accomplices):

“We often suffer from a collective amnesia about the crucial role of law-breaking in the history of social change. Martin Luther King Jr., the paragon for pacifist protest, was arrested an impressive thirty times between 1955 and 1965. And still, the effectiveness of his militant pacifism can only be properly understood against the background of many other, much more tumultuous political conflicts—riots included—that occurred throughout the civil rights movement. Political change does not, and never has, come about through peaceful protest alone. All tactics of course play a role—and riots, the threat of violence, and violence itself are frequently the context and background that situate as well as frame the force and effectiveness of more mainstream, moderate, and agreed-on tactics. In a conversation with Coretta Scott King, Malcolm X, infamous for his anti-pacifist rhetoric and direct attacks on Martin Luther King’s strategies, nonetheless stressed to King’s wife his awareness of the value of a diversity of tactics: ‘I want Dr. King to know that I didn’t come to Selma to make his job difficult. I really did come thinking I could make it

easier. If the white people realize what the alternative is, perhaps they will be more willing to hear Dr. King” (<http://anarchistnews.org/content/revolutionary-solidarity-critical-reader-accomplices>).

No doubt, dismantling the political, economic, and social basis of capitalism, statism, patriarchy, and the thousand other oppressions that define the modern world will require confrontational, or even (as a last resort) violent action, whether or not we all like it. The violent police responses to the anti-budget cuts, Occupy, & Black Lives Matter movements are a stark reminder of this sad reality. Checking privilege, calling out micro-aggressions, and demanding guilt, compliance, and submissiveness from relatively-privileged white/male/middle class activists is simply not going to cut it.

4. The specialized language and strict behavioral codes required to participate in anti-oppression movements and spaces can make them accessible only to a privileged elite (and thus unable to build a mass movement).

Common Cause Ottawa expresses this problem in damningly incisive and succinct terms:

“The culture of anti-oppression politics lends itself to the creation and maintenance of insular activist

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Rants: "Anarchy: the Facts and the Bullshit"

By Rebelnerd. Originally posted on snipeme.com, March 14, 2008.

As always, we don't endorse every word written in the pieces we re-print, but this rant has some valuable insights nonetheless.—Black Flag editors.

I'm an anarchist.

There, I said it. Today that's become the equivalent of standing on the street corner with a sandwich sign that says "I'M INSANE AND I HAVE A BOMB" but I'm not afraid to admit it. Because I don't have a bomb, and very few true anarchists do. But the philosophy of anarchism has become so overhyped, misinterpreted, and slimed by the media and (big surprise) the government over the last 100 years that what was once considered a legitimate, albeit radical, political philosophy has been reduced in the public's eye to a bunch of crazed suicide bombers running around blowing up buildings in a bleak, post-apocalyptic hellscape.

Personally, I enjoy discussing politics. I know a lot of people find it boring but I've always thought it was interesting and fun. But it annoys me that I often have to hide my being an anarchist during debates, because the minute I let it slip they go off into the same old rant, telling me to go move to Somalia if I want bloody chaos. Most people don't have a fucking clue what anarchism really means. It's much more complicated than just blowing shit up, and I'm not going to go into the whole system right now. But I do want to clear up some of the myths surrounding anarchism, and maybe clear some of the shit out of people's heads.

The classic response that always pisses me off is, of course, the old "look at Hurricane Katrina! Do you really want THAT as our way of life?" The answer, obviously, is fuck no! But people's perception of anarchism has become so perverted that they see it as a synonym of "chaos." I'm here to tell you that it's NOT the same thing. Go ahead, look at Hurricane Katrina. Take a good look at New Orleans during the aftermath. Housing developments flooded, rivers of sewage flooding through the city streets, corpses floating on peoples' front lawns, refugee camps overcrowded and starved for medicine and shelter. The city was completely unprepared, and paid the price in lives. You say it's impossible to create a working anarchist society in that environment. Well no fucking duh, try creating ANY system of government in a situation like



that! Go down into some starving, disease-infested project in New Orleans the day after the storm and try setting up a democracy. Or a communist collective. Or even a fascist dictatorship. The people won't care about your plan, they'll be too busy scavenging for food and dying of infection. If a hurricane hit an anarchist society, how is that the anarchists' fault? It's so frustrating and unfair when people say that New Orleans is an example of the failure of anarchy, and then point to some idyllic little town as an example of government's success. Of course the town looks better, it didn't have a fucking tidal wave tear it to the ground! (I could also discuss how the government's slow response was one of the reasons Katrina was so devastating, or how the police went door to door confiscating peoples' guns leaving them defenseless against looters, or how local civilian groups following anarchist-style strategies were responsible for many early relief efforts, but that's a different story).

Another shining example that always seems to spring up in conversation is the Africa reference. Try explaining the philosophy of anarchism, and some idiot always bursts out that "anarchy didn't work in those places." Because there WASN'T anarchy there! Again, we get that fusion of anarchy and chaos in peoples' minds. To them it doesn't matter what the causes of violence were, anything that involves people killing each other is automatically anarchy. "Anarchy means warlords constantly fighting each other, with innocent people caught in the crossfire like in Somalia!" they say. Well, reread that sentence. There's one big mistake that undermines their whole point: if there are warlords, then IT'S NOT FUCKING ANARCHY!!! Anarchy doesn't mean chaos, it means a lack of government and laws. If there's some warlord or mobster sitting on his throne holding his AK-47, issuing commands to thugs and subordinate drug lords, then how is that a lack of government? People think that "government" only means big, industrialized infrastructures, like in the US, and doesn't apply to gangs and mobsters. To an anarchist, government simply means anyone who has power over others. There is no difference! If anarchists held a successful revolution, the mafia bosses and gang leaders would be running for their lives same as the dictators and corrupt CEOs. The warlords wouldn't gain power; they'd have it torn down around them! And if some guy did manage to build his own little mini-empire in an anarchist world, it's the anarchists and the people's job to bring him down and restore their freedom. Those crime lords are OUR

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enemies too, so don't lump us all into the same category. (Interestingly, historians have also presented evidence that before the Europeans' arrival, many African societies were organized with no central leadership or formal laws. A council of elders made decisions but the people of the tribe were not required to obey—and these people managed to create some of the first large cities, so they were by no means ignorant savages randomly killing each other).

A third typical line that always springs up is "anarchy has never worked, and it has never contributed anything good to the world." Looking at the state of anarchism today, that may sound like a legitimate point. Most "anarchists" these days seem more interested in breaking windows than breaking the chains of the oppressed masses. But it was not always like this, and it can still go back to how it used to be. So go get that dusty old history book in the back of the shelf and start flipping through. Look up the Spanish Civil War, and see who fought on the antifascist side. Democrats, republicans, Stalinists, communists and, oh look, anarchists. Anarchists militias and armies like the Iron Column fought side by side with socialist and communist allies against the fascist uprising backed by Hitler and Mussolini, in support of the democratically

elected government Franco was attempting to overthrow. Yes, that's right. Anarchists were out there busting their asses in the field, taking down fascist bastards while the bold, heroic leaders of the US and Britain were still appeasing old Adolf and turning a blind eye while he rebuilt Germany's army. And they weren't doing it because their base had been bombed, or their international trade jeopardized. They did it because it was the right thing to do. And what did they get for this? Thanks from the Allies for their courage? No, more like centuries of persecution. They got assassinated by Pinkertons and corporate thugs in the 1800s, blacklisted by paranoid government officials, blamed for incidents like the Haymarket Riot that new evidence shows were likely perpetrated by the police, and stereotyped as a gang of bomb-throwers. You say anarchy has never worked in the long term. Well no shit, every time they try it they end up getting attacked by governments!

Look, I'm not going to try and convert you or anything. I wouldn't be much of an anarchist if I didn't respect your right to think for yourself. It just pisses me off when people spew all these myths and stereotypes around without ever giving anarchism a serious thought. How about doing some research next time before you accuse others of being crazy, Einstein.

Update: Washington Congressman Adam Smith to Support Nestora Salgado

By Sara Lerner, KIRO Radio Reporter, June 8, 2015



Adapted from: <http://mynorthwest.com/11/2771085/Renton-woman-imprisoned-in-Mexico-without-due-process>

Washington Congressman Adam Smith has announced his support for a Renton woman imprisoned in Mexico.

Nestora Salgado spent more than 20 years in Renton before heading back to her hometown of Olinalá, in a remote mountain village in Mexico. She started a legal community police force there to help locals deal with crime. Her supporters say Salgado's corrupt political enemies threw her

in jail on made-up charges without due process.

She's been in prison there, mostly in solitary confinement, for nearly two years.

Congressman Adam Smith says he's joining in the call for her release because she's a U.S. citizen and she's innocent.

"What we want for her and her family is we want her home. We want her

free where she should be," Smith said.

Smith says he understands a grassroots police force sounds like an odd thing, but it's common across Mexico, and necessary in rural areas.

"It is incontrovertible that Nestora was acting within the law," he said. "That's not even debatable."

The governor of the state of Guerrero even introduced the new community force in a public ceremony.

“Letter from the Black Flag editors” con’t...

while pointing to multiple possible ways forward. The remarks that follow can be read (and, we hope, will be read) in tandem with “Rebellion and the Future,” “We shouldn’t work with white people...,” and “Building an anti-oppression politics that works” as a multi-piece critical commentary on what we’re doing now and how we can improve.

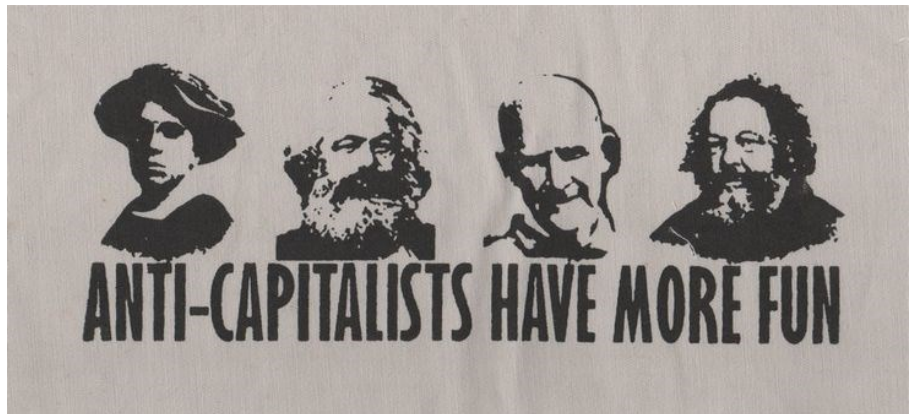
THE PROBLEM

The piece “Rebellion and the Future” reprinted in this issue, observes that many radicals, particularly anarchists, are angsty, unsatisfied, angry, and often depressed.

One reason for this dissatisfaction might be that we tend to assume that careful devotion to our radical approaches—class critique, feminism, anti-racism, decolonization, etc.—is enough to make our lives happy and meaningful. If we just check our privileges, decolonize our minds, and practice revolutionary solidarity, we’ll be fine.

But this approach fails to accomplish many additional things that we all need. It doesn’t tell us how to achieve our dreams, feel good about ourselves, find love, achieve success, resolve conflicts, or cultivate happiness and joy—“in spite of the whole world”—in our own brief, mortal lives.

In fact, focusing on external political change alone can become a direct impediment to healing and improving the self. Eric Hoffer touches on this point in his classic social psychology treatise *True Believer* (1951) when he states that “one of the most potent attractions of a mass movement is its offering of a substitute for individual hope.” If we feel dissatisfied with our own lives, it can be tempting to give up on self-improvement and self-care, and simply subordinate our needs to the “greater good” of the movement, placing any fault for our angst externally, in the flaws, injustices, and inequalities of society.



Just to be clear, we’re not denying that the structural oppression of our authoritarian capitalist-statist society is to blame for the vast majority of human suffering, poverty, mental illness, and so on. It certainly is, as has been argued in these very pages over the years. Also, we are not suggesting that personal solutions alone can resolve the pain and alienation caused by the oppressive forces in our lives. What we are saying is that our movement often succeeds at identifying, critiquing, and resisting external sources of oppression, but often fails to develop helpful personal coping strategies—internal to the movement and internal to our own psyches—for surviving in the here-and-now.

This failure is a problem for our movement for many reasons. It runs the risk of allowing conflicts to fester between comrades because we don’t have successful models or frameworks in place to resolve conflicts. It can also lead some comrades to feel entitled to criticize others without paying attention to their own flaws or blind spots—we all suffer “PTSD from capitalism,” as John Imani is fond of saying, and a comrade who successfully “decolonizes” one aspect of their thought and behavior may be unaware of their glaring oversights in another area. Such lack of awareness can, in turn, lead to nasty and anti-social forms of criticism that threaten to drive people out of the movement entirely. Movement work entails great commitment, sacrifice, and hard work, not to mention a substantial amount of personal risk. We need to ask ourselves: how many people can continue such work over the long haul if the movement itself is toxic, depressing, and demoralizing? Or to put it more bluntly, how many new people can we expect to attract to a movement of depressed misfits constantly bickering amongst themselves?

As Emma Goldman states so eloquently, anarchism is a beautiful idea. It’s about life, love, freedom, self-actualization, peace, autonomy, solidarity, mutual aid, and coexistence.

In spite of the challenges we face pursuing anarchism, we

“Letter from the Black Flag editors” con’t...

must find ways to grow, heal, thrive, and simply enjoy ourselves in pursuit of this beautiful idea.

The health and survival of our movement depend on it.

WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

We at Black Flag propose a “radical” notion—that anarchists, and other radical co-conspirators, take seriously the challenge of classical philosophy going back to Socrates: learning how best to live one’s life. We must work to understand the insights offered by the best in psychology and the other social sciences—as well as the best insights provided by our own radical traditions, including anarchism, socialism, feminism, queer liberation, anti-racism, veganism, indigenous thought, and anti-colonialism—and apply these insights practically to resolving conflicts, promoting healing, and increasing happiness.

Anarchism was always about synthesis. In its “European” variant, anarchism is often conceptualized as a synthesis between Enlightenment liberalism’s individualism and socialism’s communitarianism. It is incumbent on us now to synthesize modern social science and radical anarchist thought. It is time for us to realize that movement work can be therapeutic and necessary, but it is not always the only “therapy” we need; we need to synthesize radical direct action, radical self-care, and collective healing.

Some simple ways that we can begin to do this are:

- Developing protocols within collectives/affinity groups for resolving conflicts between individual comrades. This will of course require trial and error, debate, and struggling for consensus. However, once we have a working model, we can move forward confident in our ability to handle disagreements and challenges instead of bouncing aimlessly from crisis to crisis.
- Take movement education to the next level. In addition to focusing on “external” or “big-picture” issues like economics, racism, feminism and so on, developing “curricula” on personal topics like mental health, conflict resolution, nutrition, fitness, self-improvement, surviving and eradicating abuse, and legal and financial survival. We all personally

struggle with reconciling our radical beliefs with the demands of everyday life. We might benefit from collectivizing some of this struggle and sharing personal revelations.

- Making our radical spaces havens for art, culture, and social gatherings in addition to work spaces.
- Collectively crafting points of unity for collectives/affinity groups, both internal to groups and between them. These points could emphasize shared ideals along with agreed-upon frameworks for conflict resolution and identifying and combatting patterns of bigotry and abuse. They also must emphasize healing and making amends rather than shaming and punishment.

WHERE WE CAN LOOK FOR INSPIRATION

Fortunately, many individuals and groups—especially in feminist and queer communities—have already made real progress on these issues.

The following books, articles, and zines offer a variety of perspectives on conflict resolution, mental health, and creating safer, more positive, organizing spaces. They don’t necessarily provide a “royal road” to everything suggested in this piece, but they offer a helpful starting point:

1. *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities* (South End Press, 2011) by Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepza-Samarasinha, editors.
2. *Stay Solid!: A Radical Handbook for Youth* (AK Press, 2013) by Matt Hern, editor.
3. *Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart: Thirty True Things You Need to Know Now* (Marlowe & Co., 2004) and *How to Love: Choosing Well at Every Stage of Life* (Da Capo, 2011), both by Gordon Livingston, MD. [While Livingston may seem more “mainstream” than some of the other contributors listed here, he was a Vietnam-War-volunteer who evolved into a war resistor, and his helpful advice comes from both personal experience and professional expertise as a psychiatrist].

“Update: Washington Congressman Adam Smith to Support Nestora Salgado” con’t...

Congressman Smith says a recent case taught him that the best way to get Salgado out is to shine a light on Mexico's unfair justice system.

"If a federal government thinks no one is paying attention, they'll just go ahead and do what they want to do," he said.

Smith points to Jason Puracal, a man from Federal Way who was falsely accused and imprisoned in Nicaragua for two years. He was freed in 2012.

"If you make them look bad for holding someone they shouldn't be holding, then they can't hide," Smith said.

Last week, Salgado was transferred to a prison where she can get medical attention and see visitors. Her attorneys at Seattle University's International Human Rights Clinic say that transfer came out of pressure from the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, but was perhaps accelerated by Salgado's recent 31-day hunger strike. Her husband, Jose Luis Avila, pleaded with her to end the strike, which she did last Thursday.

Avila doesn't know if she ate anything at all during that time period. He says her transfer is a tremendous success, but he's still scared she'll be stuck in jail for years to come, while her health deteriorates.

"We had to work really hard and finally she's in this local facility, but we need to keep pushing," Avila said.

Salgado can use the telephone at the new detention center, and for the first time since her detainment, Avila is getting phone calls from his wife.

"It's amazing to listen to her. She sounds the same — her strong will to continue even though she's spent almost two years in this horrendous place," he said.

Avila and Salgado's youngest daughter, Grisel, who's in her 20s, is in Mexico City now. She was able to see her mom last week. This week, she's meeting with delegates at the U.S. embassy in Mexico. Meanwhile, she's hoping the U.S. State Department will take up her mom's case.

Congressman Smith says he, too, hopes Secretary of State Kerry will pay attention to Salgado's situation.

"It's very, very important," Smith said. "A woman's life is at stake, quite literally."

For more updates: Visit <http://freenestora.org/>
(donation link here: <http://freenestora.org/donate/>)



“Building an anti-oppression politics that works” can’t...

circles. A so-called ‘radical community’—consisting of collective houses, activist spaces, book-fairs, etc.—premised on anti-oppression politics fashions itself as a refuge from the oppressive relations and interactions of the outside world. This notion of ‘community,’ along with anti-oppression politics’ intense focus on individual and micro personal interactions, disciplined by ‘call-outs’ and privilege checking, allows for the politicization of a range of trivial lifestyle choices. This leads to a bizarre process in which everything from bicycles to gardens to knitting are accepted as radical activity.

Call-out culture and the fallacy of community accountability creates a disciplinary atmosphere in which people must adhere to a specific etiquette. Spaces then become accessible only to those who are familiar with, and able to express themselves with, the proper language and adhere to the dominant customs. Participation in the discourse which shapes and directs this language and customs is mostly up to those who are able to spend too much time debating on activist blogs, or who are academics or professionals well-versed in the dialect... The containment of radical discourse to the university further insulates the ‘activist bubble’ and subcultural ghetto.

In addition to creating spaces that are alienating to those outside of our milieu, anti-oppression discourse, call-out culture, and the related ‘communities’ leads activists to perceive themselves as an ‘enlightened’ section of the class (largely composed of academics, students, professionals, etc. who have ‘worked on their shit’ and checked their privilege) who are tasked with acting as missionaries to the ignorant and unclean masses. This anarchist separatist orientation is problematic for any who believe in the possibility of mass liberatory social movements that are capable of actually transforming society.”

To understand just how alienating the “activist bubble” can be, it might be worthwhile to read “Everything is Problematic: My journey into the center of a dark political world, and how I escaped” by Aurora Dagny (pseudonym) in the Nov. 24, 2014 issue of *The McGill Daily*.

Since the author is a former radical who has reverted to a liberal, pro-capitalist position, her article will be read by some as a hostile “hit piece” against anti-oppression radicals. However, regardless of her politics, she makes some important cautionary observations about our



movements that we all could benefit from reading. For example:

“One way to define the difference between a regular belief and a sacred belief is that people who hold sacred beliefs think it is morally wrong for anyone to question those beliefs. If someone does question those beliefs, they’re not just being stupid or even depraved, they’re actively doing violence. They might as well be kicking a puppy. When people hold sacred beliefs, there is no disagreement without animosity. In this mindset, people who disagreed with my views weren’t just wrong, they were awful people. I watched what people said closely, scanning for objectionable content. Any infraction reflected badly on your character, and too many might put you on my blacklist. Calling them ‘sacred beliefs’ is a nice way to put it. What I mean to say is that they are dogmas” (<http://www.mcgilldaily.com/2014/11/everything-problematic/>).

There are many more points that could be made, but the central conclusion should by now be clear: in the form they are often practiced, anti-oppression politics, by emphasizing individual difference and personal change, rather than finding common ground and building collective rebellion, have contributed to rifts, divisions, and inertia that threaten our ability to form an effective, mass-mobilized anti-oppressive, anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian movement.

What, then, do we do? Do we revert to the “Old Left” model of ignoring gender, racial, ableist, and other oppressions until “after the revolution”? As anarchists, we think not. However, we can’t bury our heads and ignore the current problems plaguing the movement either. We recognize the value and contributions of anti-oppression organizing, and the good intentions from which it arises. We must now try to figure out how to retain the value while overcoming the problems.

A way forward: finding a new anti-oppression paradigm

“Someone has said that it requires less mental effort to condemn than to think.”—Emma Goldman, in “Anarchism: What it Really Stands For” (1910)

Obviously, dealing with oppression is a tricky, messy, and often-uncomfortable business. Rather than trying to avoid this discomfort, or sanitize it through puritanical codes of “privilege checking” and behavioral policing, we argue that radical activists must embrace the difficulties inherent in anti-oppression work. We must develop strategies for keeping our movements and spaces as “safe” as



“Building an anti-oppression politics that works” con’t...



possible within the framework of struggling collectively to abolish the systems that oppress us.

What follow are some tentative suggestions—none of them particularly original—to take steps in the right direction:

--First of all, there is nothing wrong with checking egregious, abusive behavior; it is absolutely necessary! Insults, slurs, threats, stalking, physical violence, sexual violence, etc.—all of these can and must be called-out, checked, prohibited, and condemned IMMEDIATELY. Restorative justice processes might offer a route toward healing after such violence/aggression has occurred, but ONLY with the consent of the wronged person or survivor—their needs, along with community safety, must always come first.

--Remember, however, that comradely disagreement over theory or strategy or even behavioral standards is NOT the same thing as abuse, and should not be responded to in the same way; even the capitalist state doesn't send people to the firing squad for minor offenses like littering.

--To deal with disagreements, develop protocols or frameworks for civil and effective discussion and conflict resolution, both individually and collectively. Remember that conflict is inevitable at some point in any relationship, and even people working for the same goals will have disagreements... and that is OK! Try to focus on what's right, not who's right; try to listen calmly to opinions presented; and try to present your own positions calmly and clearly (see the reading list at the end of this issue's "Letter from the Editors" for some helpful resources).

--Related to the previous point, if an offended party or parties is unwilling or unable to resolve the conflict, and should simply minimize contact with the offending party, have methods to make this fact clear, unambiguous, and achievable. There is nothing wrong with setting appropriate boundaries.

--Rather than constantly "checking" or criticizing people for talking out of turn (or other rude behaviors) at meetings, create models that are egalitarian by design. One example that we've used in the F@@ is the "circle," in which each participant in a discussion is called on, in rotation, to speak. While a member may "pass" on their turn, no one may speak again until the circle comes back around to them (i.e. when it's their turn). Coupled with a timer allotting each person the same amount of time (e.g. 2 minutes, plus 30 seconds to wrap up), this method can avoid a lot of the problems of interruptions, arguments, "man-splaining," "white-splaining," and other problematic behaviors. A group can tweak this method to their own context and needs.

-- To build collective understanding of the various oppressions operating in society, engage in "movement education." This classic approach can go a long way toward eliminating subtle,

minor, and persistent forms of aggression and bigotry. Develop—through discussions, reading groups, film screenings, debates, or other means—common understandings of oppressions—what they are, why they exist, and how we can fight them. While participation is voluntary in anarchist work, encourage each other to participate (while accepting that some inevitably will not or cannot for various reasons). Try to sample as wide a range of views as possible, to (1) figure out what is true, and (2) understand how to analyze and refute competing or hostile arguments (and to debunk total bullshit). Try to embrace debate and disagreement; remember that friendly intellectual argument is a challenge, not an attack, and if conducted without animosity can enrich everyone involved and assist in the pursuit of truth.

--“Meet people where they're at” (this goes along with the previous point). Even the most seasoned anti-oppression activist has almost certainly gone through a long process of education and reflection to arrive where they are. Remember that people—yourself included—can and do change. Those who come to us to support or participate in our work will almost certainly not have flawless values, beliefs, or behaviors at the start (who among us does?). Patience, working together, and dialogue can build the mutual respect and solidarity we need. Hair-trigger responses, contempt, and judgment almost certainly will not.

--As a way of dealing with “privileged” people “who don't get it,” give them collective work to do. “You want to help the radical movement, privileged, cis, hetero white dude? Help us... make these copies OR carry out the trash OR pass out these fliers OR distribute this free food OR clean this mess OR [insert necessary but non-glamorous movement task].” Collective labor, especially the non-glamorous kind, can help demonstrate commitment and build trust and solidarity. Also, try to use privilege as a movement asset. If someone has a lot of money, politely ask them if they can



“Building an anti-oppression politics that works” con’t...

donate some to a critical project. Media or legal contacts can be referred/shared. College students can book spaces or speaking gigs at their schools. We all bring different strengths and weaknesses to the struggle; if we use these strategically, we can make progress together.

Inevitably, some will argue that it isn’t the job of the oppressed to educate or reform their oppressors (who just need to “deal with their shit”). However, call-out culture and privilege-checking are exactly that—the oppressed trying to reform the oppressor—in an often unproductive and divisive way. Finding strategies to work together in spite of difference will be much more effective at eliminating the very same individual behaviors that call-out culture takes aim at.

To end with a quote from “A Critique of Ally Politics” (2013, reprinted in “Revolutionary Solidarity—A Critical Reader for Accomplices”):

“Revolutionary struggle is indeed radically unsafe. It is a project that can and does mean prison or death for some of us, and it is important to be aware that these risks can intensify based on where people are situated in the matrices of oppression... The focus on individual privilege has become such a popular political discourse precisely because it does not necessarily question the structures that create that privilege. It is essential to understand how systematic forms of oppression shape us, but the point is to collectively dismantle the structures of domination that produce and perpetuate those privileges. Individual transformation can only happen concurrently, not prior to this.”

We at Black Flag want to take down all forms of oppression by building an anti-oppression politics that is practical, functional, and effective.

Contact us at faacollective@riseup.net or catullus1984@riseup.net if you’d like to help us or simply to respond to this piece.—Black Flag Editors.



Some Updates from Free Marissa Now

From a June 9th, 2015 email blast.

(1) Important article: Black Domestic Violence Survivors Are Criminalized From All Directions

This article (<http://bit.ly/1BMfPeu>) reports on how black women domestic violence survivors are particularly vulnerable to being criminalized. Their experience of domestic violence also grows more deadly when they are impacted by mandatory arrest policies. The author is Tasasha Henderson, an organizer with Love & Protect (<https://twitter.com/LoveProtectOrg>), previously known as the Chicago Alliance to Free Marissa Alexander. She highlights three black women survivors who are currently incarcerated for defending their lives:

Cherelle Baldwin

Tewkunzi Green

Paris Knox

We still say that self-defense should never be criminalized and we remind you of the No Selves to Defend project (<http://bit.ly/RS7x4n>) which showed us the legacy of black women and other women of color who were punished for defending their lives. Currently, we call for the immediate freedom of these women, as well as Tondalo Hall (<http://bzfd.it/1JU5L9P>) and everyone else who is being punished for surviving violence against them. Institutionalized racism feeds off of violence against black women and we urge the #FreeMarissa movement to keep on pushing for change. Our lives depend on it!

More info: <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/31178-black-domestic-violence-survivors-are-criminalized-from-all-directions>

(2) June 10: #StandWithNanHui Day of Action

(Note: This action has obviously passed, but we hope that readers will support the struggle to free Nan-Hui Jo moving forward—Black Flag Editors).

“Some Updates from Free Marissa Now” con’t...



On Wednesday, June 10, join the National Day of Action (<http://standwithnanhui.org/junenationalaction/>) for Nan-Hui and tell ICE: Release Nan-Hui so she can reunite with her daughter.

Nan-Hui Jo is a Korean domestic violence survivor who was forced to flee with her 6-year-old daughter to her home country of South Korea to escape the physical and emotional violence of her ex-partner and father of her daughter, and to comply with her immigration status. After her abusive ex-partner reported her actions as kidnapping, Nan-Hui was apprehended, arrested, and jailed immediately without bail, separating her from her daughter for months. Despite the fact that Nan-Hui has multiple immigration applications pending, including a VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) petition, ICE is still rushing to deport her.

Free Marissa Now stands in solidarity with Nan-Hui Jo and the call for her freedom. We need people to take some time on June 10th to call ICE and demand her freedom. Here is an excerpt from our press release (<http://bit.ly/1IocyPH>):

"Marissa Alexander and Nan-Hui Jo took measures to defend their lives from men in their lives who repeatedly attacked them. They were then aggressively prosecuted and punished for defending their lives. Like Marissa, Nan-Hui Jo was forcibly separated from her child by systems that collaborated with her abusive ex-partner who received full custody. Importantly, both Marissa's and Nan-Hui Jo's abusive ex-partners testified on record about their history of violently attacking the women, yet the experience of domestic violence was trivialized, denied, or distorted by prosecutors. While there are notable differences in their experiences, the similarities are striking and alarming. Many women are living through violent nightmares that ensnare them within a systemic pattern of events that happens again and again to thousands of survivors of domestic violence in the US."

More info here: <http://standwithnanhui.org/junenationalaction/>

Facebook event here: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1424043477918188/>

(3) Free the Jacksonville 19 / Angela Corey Out NOW Campaign

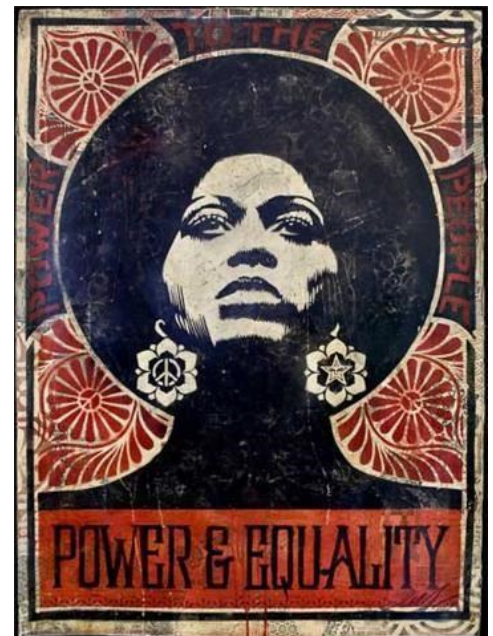
Please support the organizers in Jacksonville, who also supported the Free Marissa Now Mobilization Campaign. They are being prosecuted for exercising their right to protest against police brutality. We must protect our right to protest against injustice. You can support the Jacksonville 19, by signing the petition:

<http://iam.colorofchange.org/petitions/protestors-are-not-criminals-drop-the-charges-against-the-jacksonville-19-1>

Angela Corey, the state attorney who repeatedly prosecuted Marissa, is up for re-election this year. Angela Corey Out NOW, a grassroots coalition, is organizing to defeat her. Corey has a well-established record of prosecuting black and brown children as adults and perpetuating racial disparities within the prison system. Also, before Marissa Alexander was prosecuted, Shana Barnes -- another black woman domestic violence victim who defended her life -- was aggressively prosecuted by Corey. We take no position on Corey's campaign opponents, but as anti-domestic violence and racial justice activists, we urge the people of Angela Corey's district to vote her out!

More info here:

<http://www.fightbacknews.org/2015/6/8/jacksonville-activists-respond-state-attorney-angela-corey-running-third-term-vow-renewed-o>



Op-Ed: John A. Imani makes sense of violence at home and abroad



On Baltimore, Ferguson, Los Angeles 1992, etc.

Lay the cause of the Baltimore outbreak at the feet of where it belongs. Where? The death of Freddie Gray? The viciousness of the police? The protesters? Black people, period? Welfare? No. Though some of these contributed as matchsticks, while others served as long-harvested fuel in stoking the flames, it is the efficiency of the capitalist system that is the ultimate arsonist.

In 1947, agriculture and manufacturing employed a third of the workforce. But by 2009, those sectors employed only 1 in 8. Construction and mining together, during that time period, have remained almost exactly flat at 7.6% of the US workforce. These value-adding employments once promised a decent life to those who worked them and who worked at them armed, in the main, with only a high school diploma (see <http://theatlntc/1fdMJzX>). Now these jobs represent only 20% of the US economy.

Capitalism—with ever greater mechanization of such work—found ways to do the same and more with a relatively lesser number of workers. Today, the same pattern continues as ATM machines replace bank clerks, scanners have all but driven grocery clerks out of the markets, and the rise of driver-less technology now threatens the extinction of bus, truck, and taxi drivers.

Welfare arose as a counter-measure to these trends. Following Keynes' prescriptions (see <http://bit.ly/1eiU3dn>), it dug the bottomless pit that is public subsidy to swallow up the unemployed. That, along with stepped up law enforcement, enabled the system to “keep them down on (and off) the farm after they had seen Paree (sic),” (see <http://bit.ly/1Fjv2Uw>) i.e. after they had worked jobs-now-lost that enabled a decent living. Blacks, traditionally “last hired and first fired,” took a brunt of the blows.

And the worse things get, the more the cops raise hell. Have to. To terrify people into submission, into accepting their fate in life as unemployed, underemployed, or unemployable. It is the police who constitute the first line of public defense of a system that, because of its efficiencies, requires fewer and fewer

workers. The National Guard and, finally, the army, stand at the ready to enter the fray against workers who, out of jobs in Ferguson, were referred to as “enemy forces” (see <http://cnn.it/1G9DGWm>). Out of the mouths of boobs can sometimes come the naked truth. Indeed.

American Sniper, Predator Pilots, and Israeli Planes, Missiles, and Tanks

Courage, love of your comrades-in-arms, and self-sacrifice are battlefield phenomena that, on the surface, strike one as honorable.

Yet in *American Sniper*, the subject says it was “fun” to have killed 150 people (men and women and children of both sexes). Consider that, in civilian courts, “lying in wait” is a “special circumstance” that turns a simple murder case into a death-penalty-eligible one.

Predator pilots “flying” their drones from an air conditioned building in Henderson, NV get Distinguished Service Crosses for “distinguished” participation in a video game where one can inflict horrific circumstances upon an unsuspecting target (composed of men and women and children of both sexes).

In 2008, Israeli planes, missiles, drones and tanks poured death by explosives into Gaza, killing as many as 1400 (men and women and children of both sexes, all in the main civilians). 13 Israelis died. Yet they have the nerve to blast Palestinians for refusing to come out into the open

Con't on pg 18



“Op-Ed” con’t...

with their own planes, missiles, and tanks. What, Gaza has none of these instruments? Then which side deserves the epithet of “coward”? Firing ill-built unguided rockets (mainly into Israeli fields) is painted as the same as the launching of terribly-destructive guided missiles into crowded cities where the “collateral damage” of civilian deaths almost always exceeds the numbers of the claimed military target.

All these things tell that, while there is definitely nothing glamorous about the wars inflicted upon militarily-backwards populations by their advanced invader, the “hoorah” raised about snipers and drone “pilots” is all the more horrendous for the “much ado about nothing” that is made of the “heroes” who commit these crimes.

--John A. Imani, long-time activist, anarcho-Marxist, and a co-founder of Revolutionary Autonomous Communities, Los Angeles (RAC-LA). Contact him at johnaimani3@gmail.com.

Help fund his revolutionary work with and for RAC-LA by donating here: <http://bit.ly/1HHjZeV>



“We shouldn’t work with white people”: Toward a discussion of problematic views “trending” in today’s movement

--Black Flag Editors

Being activists, organizers, and organic intellectuals all at once, we—the F@@ anarchists who bring you *Black Flag*—regularly encounter a wide range of opinions on social issues. Generally, this diversity of opinion is a wonderful thing; open inquiry and radical social change are complementary pursuits—branches, as it were, from the same libertarian “tree.”

Recently, however, we’ve noticed some disheartening ideas being repeated in various guises throughout the Southern California movement landscape. We say “disheartening” because we believe these ideas to be both counterproductive to the movement’s vision of radical social change and demeaning/disenfranchising to certain members of our radical communities. Often, these ideas appear under the guise of free inquiry and open discussion, but actually function, overtly or otherwise, to stifle free thought and free speech. Meme-like, these ideas propagate, and threaten to become the “new normal” if not challenged.

So, below, we will attempt to challenge one of them, with other such challenges to be launched in later issues. We will present a generic version of an idea, and attempt to refute it, re-conceptualize it, or destabilize it the best we can. We don’t claim to have all the answers, but we would like to broaden the current discussion. As always, we respect diversity of opinion along with diversity of tactics, and we welcome discussion and debate on all issues.

If you’d like to have a say in this dialogue, email us at faacollective@riseup.net. We’d be glad to publish your ideas (with your permission, of course).

Problematic Idea: “White people should not be a part of radical movements” or “Anarchist people of color (APOCs) shouldn’t work with white people”

Let’s begin by acknowledging that racism is alive and well, and that white supremacy and white privilege are serious ongoing problems. In fact, the late Dr. Joel Olsen’s *White Supremacy* pamphlet from the *Lexicon* series provides a hard-hitting and concise analysis of these phenomena

“We shouldn’t work with white people” con’t...

from an anarchist-leaning standpoint (check it out here: <http://bit.ly/1eiG6MC>).



writing on *Alternet* about the Dolezal story, makes the following instructive comments:

The problem is, saying “white people benefit from white privilege, therefore they should be excluded from radical social movements” is a non sequiter. First of all, it’s not intersectional. While a white person may benefit from white privilege, that same white person might be systemically oppressed in other ways. Don’t white women face sexism? Don’t white trans people face transphobia? Don’t poor white people face economic exploitation? What about members of historically-oppressed minority groups who may nonetheless be deemed “white” by contemporary American standards—some white Jews and Muslims, for example? (this last point brings up some of the difficulties in defining and demarcating racial categories—e.g. what is a “white” person, after all?—a complicated discussion which will have to wait for another piece).

Granted, as Dr. Olsen discusses, white supremacy may alleviate the oppression experienced by white “underdogs”; for example, while all wage workers are exploited under capitalism, white workers face much lower levels of unemployment than other groups. Nevertheless, it is overly-simplistic to say that, because white supremacy is real, whites are not oppressed as workers under capitalism or as citizens of an authoritarian state. As law professor Rachel D. Godsil observes: (a) because white people are still a demographic majority, “most poor people in the United States are white,” and yet (b) “blacks and Latinos are disproportionately poor—27 percent of African Americans and 25 percent of Latinos are poor, compared to just 9 percent of whites” (read Godsil’s piece here: <http://bit.ly/1C9AzwU>). That (a) and (b) are both true demands an approach that both deals with white supremacy and addresses general forms of oppression that affect (even if less severely) whites along with non-whites. Such an approach cannot result from excluding white radicals from the movement.

Furthermore, we must ask the question: don’t we want white radicals on our side? Can’t white co-conspirators be an asset in dismantling white supremacy (and other oppressions), just as, for example, Israeli Jewish resisters of occupation can be an asset to the liberation struggle of Palestinians? Obviously, there’s a right way and a wrong way for white people to be such co-conspirators, as the recent Rachel Dolezal scandal makes clear. Tim Wise,

“Whether intended or not, by negating the history (and even the apparent possibility) of real white antiracist solidarity, Dolezal ultimately provided a slap in the face to that history by saying it wasn’t good enough for her to join. That the tradition of John Brown, of John Fee, of the Grimke sisters, of Anne and Carl Braden and Bob and Dottie Zellner, to name a few, wasn’t a meaningful enough heritage for her to claim. She wasn’t willing to pay her dues, to follow the lead of people of color. She didn’t want to do the hard and messy work, struggling with other white people and challenging them, which is what SNCC told us white folks to do in 1967, and what Malcolm had already said shortly before his death” (read Wise’s piece here: <http://bit.ly/1ToQB04>).

Wise’s remarks highlight the important role white people can play in anti-authoritarian struggle, even as Wise acknowledges the limitations of this role. No, white people are not needed to lead the “benighted” people of color to the “promised land.” No, white people should not hog the limelight, take up all the “space,” or position themselves as representative of groups to which they don’t belong. However, white radicals can and should be allies and comrades in the diverse struggles to make the world fair and equal for everyone—perhaps most importantly as a model for, and challenge to, other white people.

Finally, as anarchists, we respect all people’s autonomy to create radical spaces, movements, or groups that are “safe” or “members-only,” such as women’s-only or black-only formations. We only ask that equal respect be afforded to our equally-important multi-gender and multi-racial anarchist approach.

We encourage readers to check out “Building an anti-oppression politics that works,” also in this issue. —Black Flag editors.



Rebellion and the Future

By Squee

This piece, submitted to Anarchist News on April 25, 2015, makes some very insightful, timely observations on the current state of anarchist organizing in the US. Note: the ellipses (or “dots”...) below are not editorial omissions of ours—they are part of the author’s writing style. Read the original here: <http://anarchistnews.org/content/rebellion-and-future>—Black Flag Editors

The themes of time, context, and rebellion have run through a variety of anarchist events that I have attended lately. This has taken the form of discussions about lifestylism (with CrimethInc often cited), leftist ideals of the Revolution, the notion of prefiguration, and ideologies. The conversations usually go something like this:

- Leftist revolutionary movements construct the image of an ideal, future society; one without capitalism, class, the State, and various systemic prejudices. Some of the developments which come out of this sort of revolutionary ideal are: organizing in a manner that takes a form similar to that of organizations in the future society (prefiguration), developing strategies for taking over the means of production (syndicalism), trying to inspire the correct subjects to insurrection (general strikes, occupations, riots), and generally orientating towards the future as a time of salvation, liberation, and peace.
- However, anarchists don’t necessarily have a blueprint for an ideal, future society. Anarchists who have focused on the present moment and sought to immediately deal with the ways that they are limited and smothered by the social structures governing them appear throughout modern history. This sometimes leads to drop-out cultures, the creation of self-sustaining communes, illegal methods of sustaining themselves, attack as an expression of personal and practical desires, as well as dietary, racial, sexual, and gender-oriented considerations.
- Leftist revolutionary ideals are an absurd waste of time in the 21st Century and they put one on a well bloodied path of monotheistic idealism, ideology, and politics. The problem then becomes the global scope of the systems that subjugate us and how granular their focus becomes when they attack. Even when

ignoring or opposing a leftist, revolutionary orientation, attempting to fight one’s way out of the mess of one’s individual life makes one an enemy of these systems. There is no clear strategy for winning at the individual or collective level.

- When dropping out, illegal subsistence, collective living, free love, and attacking from the shadows isn’t enough to gain autonomy or requires more than a reasonable amount of risk, it becomes clear that not only are the Left’s myths absurd, but imagining a future that is not bleak (or one even worth living in) is difficult. This provides further motivation to focus on the present, immediate alleviation of one’s suffering; but, in doing so it traps rebellion between conformity (total failure) and activities that have little-to-no impact on the order of things ...even if they are the least compromising of methods available for survival. Without any future orientation whatsoever, rebellion is limited to dodging blows without effectively striking back. So, to carry out a rebellion that grows and accumulates power instead of one that consistently crumbles back into the ruins from which it emerged, some sort of future-orientation becomes necessary... if only to respond with consideration to the patience of our enemies.

To start answering the questions above, let’s start by remembering that even if we are not all dispossessed and recently proletarianized, we are at least not in possession of any means to sustain or own lives, nor methods for using acquired means that would create a foundation upon which sustained attacks against our enemies can become more effective. At this point, even as a superficially self-sustaining intentional community, we would not have the means to prevent shit like the pollution of the atmosphere we depend on (or global warming), surveillance/infiltration/attacks from the State, energy resources we’d need (hence, the market), etc. Even if we somehow did manage to carve out a more permanent autonomous zone, chances are that it would not sustain generationally: even with the best forms of indoctrination (which would require the sort of ideology we’re rejecting here) kids will want into the grandeur of the metropolis... whether for sex, for fun, or because it does a better job of creating cheap, entertaining shit. So to the extent that lacking space, means, and autonomy could be alleviated, that lack already puts us a long way from having places for ourselves that are not a compromise with our enemies.

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For anarchists, whose rebellion has broadened to all that which may subjugate them, there are far fewer packages to buy and issues to think of as singularly important than there are for those rebels who oppose one form of domination, but not all. Anarchist rebellion is so broad that it takes as its enemy almost the entirety of established institutional society. This means that beyond the lack of possession discussed above, for an anarchist to survive there is additional and inevitable compromise with one’s enemies. This compromise can range from a variety of jobs, to the desperations of poverty, to the risks of being caught carrying out illegal actions to simply live another day, to giving up a rebellion against all forms of domination. Anarchist rebellion begins and often ekes out an existence in the terrifying, lonely corner of near-complete rejection of and enmity for the world. This means that even for an anarchist to simply survive as an anarchist, they are already in a perpetual state of rebellion.

Survival and compromise, which can never be satisfying, creates an individual interest in... making shit better. To do this without entirely losing whatever it was that one thought was worth fighting the whole entire social order for, it becomes desirable and maybe necessary to meet other rebels. Meeting others and even devising some methods to alleviate each other of some pains which rebellion brings can also and often does become insulating: a life in a sometimes less painful bubble midst a society one was already alienated from. Here enters the lovely world of group dynamics, with its problems of group-think, status jockeying, power plays, personality clashes, and in-group mentality. This can happen in a collective living situation, a cooperative business, a syndicalist union, a social clique, a street gang, a gaggle of squatters, whatever... it happens with groups generally. Out of individual and collective interest in surviving with as little compromise as possible, anarchists come together to try and figure it out and yet still, only more problems!

On top of those group dynamic problems, the particular attitudes and values of anarchists can compound the isolation, hopelessness, and angst many anarchists experience. Anarchists groups can often be a downright miserable series of relationships that may seem like they

were created from a false premise, even if they weren’t. More to the point, such a context itself can hallow out the future of anything desirable. Any belief in eventual individual satisfaction, fulfillment, joy and/or collective wellbeing, sustainability, care and—god forbid!—a successful attack or autonomous space. The misery of living with miserable people can completely rip the future as a creative, imaginal space from the psyche and throw it into oblivion with the rest of this damned world. But ought we to oppose an orientation towards the future? I do not think so.

Futures aren’t solely a realm specific to ideologues and theologians. The persistence of subjectivity through time and in orientation towards a future existence is the framework for rebellion. Rebellious activity already assumes that there is something worth protecting and preserving, something that is worth defending in its existence against whatever forces attempt to oppress, dominate, subjugate, or exterminate it. Without that something, it’s not rebellion. Some anarchists are more

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“Letter from the Black Flag editors” con’t...

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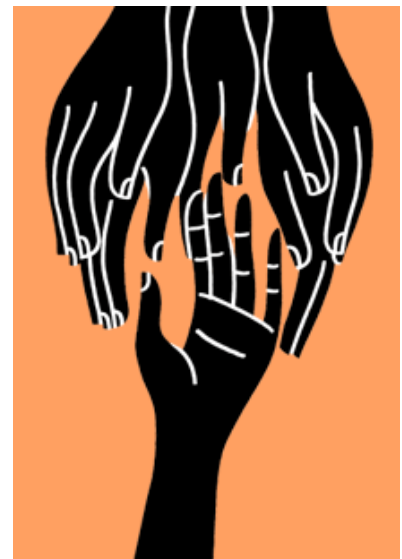
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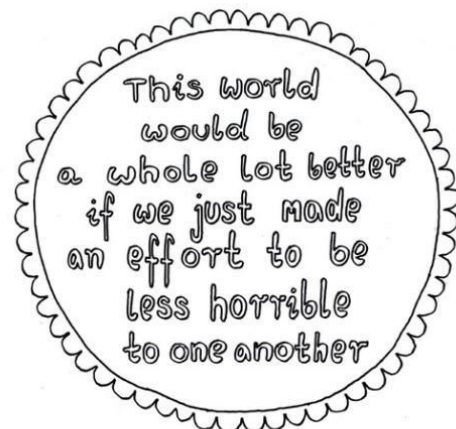
egoistic and their rebellion takes the form of first being an attempt at realizing an immediate desire. But at the moment when the realization is opposed by force, it again puts action in the realm of rebellion. Even for the orientation of maximizing one’s potential to realize one’s desires generally, there is already within the relationship between the subject and its context an orientation towards a future. There is a future for the something: the uniqueness of the individual, the skills or space to act upon immediate desires, or the qualities of one’s identity which cannot be changed and are nevertheless condemned in the social order.

To first emphasize what is disgusting about ideology with a special consideration to Leftist revolutionary thinking: these forms of thought insert poison into the imaginal spaces of our futures. They don’t themselves invent the entire framework for the future; the phenomenological scaffolding which is substantiated with goals, dreams, visions, and aspirations. Furthermore, what ideological garbage does is replace that something which one is protecting and preserving in the rebellious act with an Other: State, Soul, Man, Singularity, Reason, Rights. The reason for the act is controlled by ideology for these Others. Ideology additionally benefits from disguising these Others as something objective... something with more reality, weight, and value than individual subjects and their finite, mortal, and muddled existences. These Others that are supposedly more important and more valuable than the individual agent have futures that will persist, that will be worthy of a rebel’s anguished existence, that will be the Future of all futures... says the ideologue.

That said, there is still a future orientation presumed in the act of rebellion and this includes the anarchists’ rebellions... even after rejecting the Left. The difference is that this future orientation would depend upon the individuals involved as the something protected and preserved, and would aim at what anarchists already aim at in their togetherness, even if feebly: places to live, play, and plot that require as little compromise as possible with the existing order. Methods of surviving and attacking that attempt to expand the space and means by which to further survive and attack. A better squat, maybe next week. A new arrangement for free food. A more accurate understanding of how to eliminate that which subjugates us to it. Whatever that future orientation is, in whatever distance... it is there. To not focus on it, to confuse it with ideology, or to attempt to

cut oneself off from a future orientation entirely conflicts with one of the fundamental properties of rebellion itself.

There are additional reasons why attempting to cut oneself off from a future orientation is a bad idea which are tied into the ontological question, the ways in which time plays into subjectivity, and other shit beyond the scope of this piece. As a teaser, one of those reasons is because it forces you into a past orientation, which is what a present-tense context is constructed from: past traumas, conditions, meanings, relationships, habits, diseases, financial situations, legal statuses, etc. There are practices related to the present-tense that are meditative and attempt to break with the past, but those are difficult and impractical mental states to maintain... even if valuable from time to time. Anyway, it’s what I have mentioned above that ties into resolving issues of time and context in anarchist theory. A future orientation itself doesn’t provide any particular practices worth promoting to improve everyday life and our individual life stories, but it keeps the door open for practices that require more long-term thinking and it maintains coherence with rebellious activity in general.



Ellen Page
14.02.2014

This piece, from the second chapter of Alan Sutton's book Amerigeddon (The People's Press, 2014), offers a devastating analysis of how and why corporate elites dominate American policy. —Black Flag Editors.

Plutocracy

The wealthy have installed their slaves in the highest spheres of the state.

—Stephane Hessel

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the corporate community, led by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, became convinced that America was slipping out of its hands and that the government was growing far too concerned with the needs of the poor and working class (1). Ever since, corporations and the wealthy have devoted extraordinary resources to dominating the political process and the governance of the nation. They have succeeded, as the movement of both political parties to the right demonstrates. This movement to the right is not reflected by a shift in public opinion (2).

The Inner Circle was ensconced in the Pool Room at the Four Seasons, charged with delivering another banner year for militarized state capitalism, aka the "national interest." That the majority of the people are tired of endless war and seeing their country go down the tubes, means nothing to these captains of industry, career politicians, professional soldiers, and their managed media collaborators. Answerable only to the financial gangsters who own and run America, they look down their noses at the general population from the first class section of the gravy train.

K, veteran fixer for the high and mighty, was pontificating in a thick accent about the obligation of "the responsible men" to hold sway over the affairs of state—"the issues are much too important for the people to be left to decide for themselves"—his face resembling a candle at mid-melt.

A small group of U.S. institutions select, groom, train, and certify a small number of individuals as exceptionally talented and warranting privilege. Bright prospects are passed along to think tanks, institutes, and centers. There they learn the art of developing "policy



proposals" and demolishing the arguments of their enemies. The tanks and centers function as ideological auxiliaries mobilized to promote the agendas favored by their sponsors (3). As an executive at one prominent think tank explained, "We're not here as some kind of Ph.D. committee giving equal time. Our role is to provide conservative public policy makers with arguments to bolster our side."

Alec, mouthpiece of the military-industrial-prison-financial cartel, reminded everyone of their marching orders – to advance the interests of their corporate masters and to claim at the same time that these efforts also serve the interests of the whole society: "We have a moral obligation to do what is right for the country"—with a straight face—"and we must be ready to draw a line in the sand rather than compromise our core principles."

Joint Chiefs honcho Sheldon Jamison, his tongue loosened by frequent sips of Old No. 7, began to wonder out loud if MAD [mutually assured destruction] was an obsolete concept in the post 9-11 era: "We now have the ability to win a war without pulling any punches," striking his palm. "The decline in Russia's arsenal and the slow pace of modernization of China's nuclear forces, have created a situation in which neither could retaliate to our preemptive strike."

The US, a country with a vast nuclear weapons arsenal, whose political leaders are both corrupt and insane, is a great danger to life on earth. The criminal psychopaths in Washington have squandered trillions of dollars on their wars, killing and dispossessing millions of Muslims while millions of American citizens have been dispossessed of their homes and careers. Now the entire social safety net is on the chopping block so that Washington can finance more wars (4).

Wall Street uses economic power backed by the threat of state power and the power of Western institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to insert itself into political economies around the globe and then restructure them for its own benefit (for examples, see Goldman

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Sachs’ currency swaps and their effect on Greek political economy or the effect of IMF “structural adjustment” programs in South America). Through exploitative economic extraction based on naked power relationships Wall Street is both economically and politically destabilizing around the globe (5).

In fact it is highly probable that the 2008 financial crash was very carefully engineered to considerably weaken the world economy in order for the US to strengthen its control, which was cemented by heavily investing its public funds into the Wall Street banks that in fact form the core of its power (6).

Threats to U.S. financial hegemony by such as Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi to transfer payments for their raw energy products into the European Euro have been effectively and quickly resolved by their overthrow and elimination (7) (As Mike Whitney points out, “The dollar is the foundation upon which rests the three pillars of imperial strength: political, economic and military. Remove that foundation and the entire edifice comes crashing to earth.”)

“21st century markets are much more powerful than any government,” opined Wall Street bankster Floyd Blankcheck, eager to get on with doing God’s work. “Derivatives aren’t called ‘financial weapons of mass destruction’ for nothing.”

The most deadly weapons of mass destruction being used in the world today are not chemical or biological, they are the rules established by the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the so-called free trade agreements that only escalate the levels of global inequality, human suffering and death (8).

Unknown to much of the public, Wall Street has been soaking state and municipal coffers with derivatives schemes and various frauds for years (9). Wallace Turbeville of the think tank Demos, referring to derivatives purchased by state and local governments, concludes that these municipalities would be better off hedging their risks by building a cash reserve, instead of paying the financial sector exorbitant fees for a product they don’t understand.

As Michael Hudson has informed us, the goal of the financial sector has always been to convert all income, from corporate profits to government tax revenues, to the service of debt. From the bankers’ standpoint, the more debt, the richer the bankers.

“If there is one thing both conservatives and liberals agree on, it is that the system is rigged against them,” Chester South, a cable news windbag worth millions, interjected into the disjointed discussion. South was a hero to struggling whites who believe the economic stress they’ve experienced for decades is due to the government taking their money and giving it to the poor, who are disproportionately black and Latino. “What I would worry about is an alliance between the Tea Partiers and the Occupiers.”

Alec had heard enough. “This isn’t the fucking ‘60s,” he spit. “Nowadays we have ways to prevent the wrong class of people from interfering with public affairs” (one of the reasons why “the sixties” continues to be a favorite punching bag of neocons and neoliberals is that it represented a decade of prolonged popular political education unique in recent American history).

The General, too, was getting hot under the collar. “We have to maintain the strongest military on the planet,” he fumed. “There is no alternative to spread freedom and prosperity.”

For American elites one of the longest lasting and most powerful foreign policy goals has been preventing the rise of any society that might serve as a good example of an alternative to the capitalist model.

As the late former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer Phillip Agee has written, “The CIA, after all, is nothing more than the secret police of American capitalization, plugging up leaks in the political dam night and day so that shareholders of US companies operating in poor countries can continue enjoying the rip-off.”

– Alan Sutton

Check out Alan’s book online at: http://www.amazon.com/Ameri-Geddon-Alan-Sutton/dp/1500809144/ref=tmm_pap_title_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=&qid



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